



MINNESOTA PUBLIC
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
www.mpha.net

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Tim Walz
Governor of Minnesota
130 State Capitol
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis

Dear Governor Walz:

We are writing today to ask that you to join other governmental bodies¹ **in declaring racism a public health crisis in Minnesota**. The Minnesota Public Health Association (MPHA), a professional association comprised of public health workers, health care providers, advocates and students, is dedicated to the health of all people who live in Minnesota.

The recent killing of George Floyd underscores the need for rapid changes to address the health inequities that exist within Minnesota. A growing number of cities, counties and states throughout our nation have already declared racism a public health crisis, and followed those declarations with an allocation of resources and strategic actions to drive needed changes to move toward health equity. The same, swift action should be taken here in Minnesota.

According to data from the United Health Foundation, Minnesota has ranked in the top 10 healthiest states in the nation for the past three decades. But this ranking does not tell the whole story. Too many people in Minnesota are not as healthy as they could and should be, and the health disparities that exist are significant, persistent and cannot be explained by genetic factors. Minnesota's disparities are manifested in our population's unequal health outcomes and mortality rates. The opportunity to be healthy should be equally available everywhere and for everyone, but the data reveals otherwise.

MPHA is acutely aware of the significant and longstanding disparities in health outcomes among African Americans, American Indians and other populations of color in Minnesota and elsewhere. These disparities are an indication of deep systemic inequities that exist to prevent some communities from thriving and achieving optimal health. The landmark report from the Minnesota Department of Health *Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota*² identified the social determinants of

1 <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity/racism-and-health/racism-declarations>

2 <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/reports/aheexecutivesummary.pdf>

health (e.g. poverty, income, and housing) as well as systemic issues such as structural racism, discrimination, and conscious and unconscious racism that are deeply engrained in all of our systems and benefit some populations, while having an adverse impact on others. These inequities and health disparities are evidenced in health outcomes, and most recently seen in the higher rates of illness and death in our American Indian and populations of color due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Racism manifests itself in institutional and structural ways (e.g. laws, institutions, schools, justice system, media and culture) that deeply harm the health and well-being of our communities. In Minnesota, African Americans, American Indians and other populations of color, particularly Black and Indigenous populations, experience higher rates of nearly every adverse measure of population health. These populations have higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, cancer, diabetes, pulmonary and heart diseases, and have shorter average lifespans than whites.³ American Indians and other populations of color have less access to homeownership and other economic opportunities, and are less likely to reach grade-specific proficiency in math and reading or graduate high school. Additionally, these populations are exposed to more pollution than their white neighbors.⁴

As the premier public health association in Minnesota, with over 100 years of history, the Minnesota Public Health Association (MPHA) thanks you for your outstanding leadership. We ask that you declare that **racism is a public health crisis** that affects both our state and the entire country. We urge you to commit to making Minnesota a place of racial equity and justice for American Indians and communities of color.

Respectfully,

The MPHA Governing Council

Kristen Ackert, Donna Anderson, Michelle Brasure, Donna DeGracia, Erica Fishman, Matt Flory, Jessica Flotterud, Nancy Franke Wilson, Merry Grande, Annie Halland, Cindy Kallstrom, Laura Klein, Holly Kostrzewski, Jaime Martinez, Elizabeth Moe, Kristin Moore, Julie Myhre, Kathy Norlien, Melanie Peterson-Hickey, Kalli Plump, Ellen Saliars, Cherylee Sherry, Claire Flemming Sivongsay, and Ann Zukoski

3 <https://data.web.health.state.mn.us/>

4 <http://www.mncompass.org/disparities/race#1-9538->
<ghttps://www.minneapolisfed.org/~media/assets/pages/education-achievement-gaps/achievement-gaps-mn-report.pdf?la=en>, <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/research-brief-black-and-hispanic-minorities-us-bear-disproportionate-burden-air-pollution>